



# *Milwaukee County*

## Board of Supervisors

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### **PARKS AND ARTS: PROMOTE, PRESERVE, AND PROTECT**

*For the first time in 20 years, parks funding will not be cut in County Budget*

Milwaukee, WI – Milwaukee County Board members have responded to overwhelming public support for parks and arts, in adopting a 2007 County Budget. The Board has taken bold moves to protect these resources in 2007.

Parks, Energy, and Environment Committee Chair Lynne De Bruin said the Board was handed a budget that would have cut parks funding by 20 percent. “My constituents have told me that’s way too drastic,” De Bruin said. “At the minimum, they want to see the funding stay at least at 2006 levels. And that’s what the Board did.”

Board member Gerry Broderick said, “We must focus on the preservation and maintenance of our parks system. But because no additional resources are dedicated to the parks, we must be creative in how we fund them.”

In the amended 2007 County Budget, Supervisors restored 58 Park Maintenance Worker positions to keep our parks clean and green. It’s worth it, according to De Bruin: “We have one of the largest parks systems in the country at almost 15,000 acres. It’s not cheap to operate, and the County Board is putting funds into maintaining these facilities. The last thing you should do is allow the parks to deteriorate. And we’re listening to our constituents. We’re making parks a priority.”

Supervisor Michael Mayo, Sr., said we should look at the County’s golf courses in particular, which account for approximately 40 percent of the county’s revenue. “You have to spend money to make money. Whether these golfers are beginning or advanced players, we need to make the necessary improvements so they will continue to enjoy our wonderful golf courses,” Mayo said.

The County Executive's plan to close dozens of pools seems to have little public support. In fact, his recommended budget did not follow through on recommendations from the Aquatic Master Plan Advisory Committee. That panel includes five individuals appointed by the County Executive. The Board, in its version of the 2007 Budget, has passed its own plan to keep pools open, adopting most of the suggestions from the Advisory Committee, including staggering pool hours to maximize customer service and flexibility for staffing.

"County Executive Scott Walker totally misses the mark. The public is demanding high-quality aquatics at a reasonable cost," said Supervisor John Weishan. "People don't want splash pads. They want regular pools. We've done that by extending pool hours and lowering prices. We have a better plan and a long-range vision."

County Supervisor Marina Dimitrijevic stated that the Board continues to use creativity in coming up with more efficient ways to operate pools. "Walker just wanted to simply close pools and open splash pads. But our plan is different. We've come up with ways to generate more revenue to help offset the costs of keeping pools open for longer hours. I want these pools to be available for future generations. Whether it's children taking swimming lessons or therapeutic benefits for the elderly, we need to keep these pools open," Dimitrijevic said.

The Board also approved a budget amendment to restore 5% cuts to arts and cultural organizations in the County, while maintaining almost all funding to the Milwaukee Art Museum. The change has no impact on the tax levy, because of increased revenues expected from the Potawatomi Casino. The county has an existing agreement with the Potawatomi Tribe, which will result in \$250,000 in additional revenue, based on updated projections for 2007.

Board Chairman Lee Holloway suggested the Museum look for new funding opportunities. "This amendment to keep \$250,000 funding for the Art Museum was the right thing to do at this time. But, in many other cities, museum budgets rely more on the private sector for their operations. I encourage the museum to explore all available opportunities moving forward," Holloway said. Milwaukee County provides the Museum with its single largest grant.

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